



Testimony of  
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Education Committee Hearing  
March 14, 2018

***SB 455 An Act Concerning Minority Teacher Recruitment and Retention***

Good afternoon Senator Slossberg, Senator Boucher, Representative Fleischmann, and members of the Education Committee. My name is Daniel L. Durant Jr. and I have been an organizer AFT Connecticut for the last 11 years. I am here to testify in favor of **SB 455 An Act Concerning Minority Teacher Recruitment and Retention**.

For the past several years the Hartford Federation of Teachers and the Hartford Federation of Paraeducators have been actively working on a campaign to recruit and retain teachers of color. This work has come with significant challenges as the pathway for individuals seeking certification seems particularly arduous for people of color.

In Hartford, we get a large number of teachers from an organization called Teach For America. The vast majority of these teachers undergo a competitive selection process, are graduates of Ivy League schools, are Caucasian and usually only remain in the school district for a couple of years. Our school district spends a significant amount of money to have a contract with Teach For America that recruits these young and energetic teachers that rarely choose teaching as their long term professional career. The pathway for these teachers includes student loan forgiveness after just a few years of teaching in an urban district, though, more often than not, they move on to pursue other careers after their obligation is fulfilled. Further, Teach For America teachers get a special waiver from the state and have two years to obtain an actual state certification though they perform the duties of and are paid as regular classroom teachers. This strategy is not only ineffective at recruiting teachers of color, but it is monetarily inefficient because it places a heavy burden on our district to have to constantly replace teachers with new recruits from the same organization that provided the outgoing teachers in the first place.

On the other hand, we have para educators who, in Hartford for example, are 70% of color, over 50% of whom live in the Hartford community and over 200 out of the 485-member bargaining unit, already have at least a bachelor's degree. Some even have master's degrees and have taught in other states or in another country they migrated from. Many of these para educators have worked in the Hartford Public School system for decades demonstrating

commitment to the students of Hartford Public Schools yet have been unable to obtain a teacher certification or waiver as they seek certification. Many of them function similar to temporary substitutes and display characteristics of a head teacher but are still paid as para educators. These educators seeking certification do not get temporary certification waivers, no tuition reimbursement nor is there much capital investment in the recruitment of this local human resource. We believe focusing energy and resources here is not only a more efficient recruitment strategy and a more effective retention strategy, but it would be a significant economic stimulus for these majority Hartford residents.

Recently, the teacher certification agency RELAY was approved by the state board of education to certify individuals seeking to become teachers. Currently, the district has a 1-year MOU with up to 8 of our Hartford para educators in that program. While it is a step in the right direction, Relay, which advertises that almost 2/3 of their recruits are people of color, is not enough. Not to mention, my understanding is that Relay is not an institution of higher learning where graduates obtain any university credit towards a degree. Our hope is that the CSUs in our state can provide much more competitive individualized certification programs that not only focus on para educators who are much more likely to remain in the school district after certification, but also ensures that courses leading to certification actually count as university credit in our state universities.

SB 455 provides an opportunity for us to build on the conversation about a very specific strategy to address the gross disparities in our educator to student ratios by focusing on local human capital. In doing so, we can design and implement a much more competitive university process, provide a cost benefit analysis and embark on a much more efficient way of conducting the business of minority teacher recruitment and retention.

Today, I urge you to add language to bill SB 455 that would include a study of the feasibility and cost of a program that would be offered at the State University system that would provide an individualized, accelerated program of study for paraeducators that recognizes their classroom experiences while still providing a high-quality education required to transition from paraeducators to teachers.

Thank you for the opportunity to testify. I would be happy to answer any questions you may have.